

# Talaparige

*Nature's science and art of water management*

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*The word talaparige is used for the point where water springs out from sandy soil. This is a unique water source that gets activated only when the tank dries up. Talapariges were major sources of water supply in the hilly areas of Tumkur, Chitradurga and Kolar districts. Once revered and celebrated by the community, talapariges were focal points of rural culture. Sadly, today talapariges have disappeared.*

With their head warmly covered to avoid the early morning chill, Nagarappa, Gopali, Narasappa and Anji along with other labourers set out westwards in the wee hours of dawn to reach the big tank in the village. Their job was to repair the *talaparige* canal. They are not alone in their mission. Groups of men are already at work at different points - working to repair the canal. The canal runs for about 1.5 km from the *talaparige* in the centre of the tank to the main sluice. This activity takes place every year between January-March.

## What is a *talaparige*?

A *talaparige* is the point in the tank bed where water springs out from the sandy soil. It is also referred to as a swamp or a sweet water spring. Water from a *talaparige* is harnessed at the point where the maximum water springs out. *Talapariges* however become active only when the water in the tank dries up. Water in *talapariges* is used as drinking water for humans and animals and also for agricultural purposes.

*Talapariges* are found on rocky surfaces of the hill slopes where the water flows down during the monsoon and dries up in the summer, as well as on riverbanks, rivulets or streams. When it rains, water soaks in through cracks in the rocks and boulders and collects as subterranean water. It later springs forth wherever there is sandy soil. Rain water that collects under the earth by the banks of rivers, rivulets or streams gushes forth through *talapariges* when these water sources run dry in summer and the sand is struck. The point where water trickles, oozes or springs out is called the *talaparige*.

*Talapariges* do not have any definite shape. Most generally have a stonewall on three sides with an open portion on one side, so as to facilitate flow of water. A pit is dug wherever water can soak through. The maximum depth is about 15 feet, although the average depth is only 5 feet. The length and breadth is usually between

15-20 feet. As the canals are equal in measurement to these *talapariges*, both sometimes appear to be a single structure. While *talapariges* are generally built of stone in the middle of the tanks, sometimes these can also be found in places where there are no tanks.

The uniqueness of a *talaparige* is that water flows out of it only when it is used. This is owing to the fact that the eye of the *talaparige* closes when water does not flow out. The portion or the corner of the *talaparige* from where water oozes out is called the 'water eye'.

This point is of special significance. Workers who repair the canal observe this eye constantly to prevent it from getting covered with topsoil. For instance, the *talaparige* in Akkiramapur, Koratagere Taluk remained unused for many years, and the 'water eye' has choked up with moss and lichen.

In Karnataka, *talapariges* exist in the rocky surfaces of the mountainous areas of Tumkur, Kolar and Chitradurga districts. Anantapur and Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh are also believed to have *talapariges*. Some sources claim that the word is of Telugu origin, though in some places it has local derivatives too.

### Many spendoured wonder

Each *talaparige* is different from the other in shape and size. Often, a *talaparige* merely the size of a floor mat can supply water to over hundreds of acres. Some *talapariges* are akin to small tanks. Several *talapariges* can exist in a limited area. These generally form a chain adjoining the slope of the earth with a gap of about



0.5 to 2 km between them. “Water equivalent to a 10 hp outflow is generally available in our *talaparige*,” states Dr. Nagaraj Pradhan of Akkiramapur.

*Talapariges* have another special feature. As they are found below the ground level, water does not normally flow to the adjacent fields. It travels some distance in the canal and then irrigates the lands there.

The instance of the *talaparige* at Rayavara village is interesting. It was situated near a burial ground in the village, it fed water to the fields at Akkiramapur located at a distance of eight km. The villagers of Rayavara village asserted a right over the water in the *talaparige*. Rayavara has about 200 houses and the villagers raised their summer crop using the *talaparige* water. The canal was as wide as the tank canal and its repairs as well as maintenance costs were the responsibility of these villagers. However, for the past few years, drought conditions have affected the *talaparige* and the interest of the villagers is also on the decline. Though the *talaparige* still exists, the canal is full of weeds. Lakshamma of Akkiramapur says, “We would get good sweet water from this *talaparige* and have had many celebrations here. At that time, the community in Rayavara took care of the canal, but they have now stopped doing so.”

The *talaparige* of R. Venkatapura near Akkiramapur was once secured with stone slabs but is now in ruins. “People have gone in for pump sets and borewells. *Talapariges* are lost in this modernity,” rues Hanumanthappa, a community member.

Yet, the Hosakere chain of Madhugiri Taluk is a good example of the *talapariges* since there are four contiguous ones over a stretch of 10 km. These are the lifelines for all the surrounding villages.

In another case, the water from the *talaparige* is directed from the main channel to three channels near the paddy fields. This division ensures an equitable distribution to all of them. For this purpose, the gap between each channel is measured. A coconut palm is cut to the right measurement; when placed across the main canal, a uniform volume of water flows out. A *Gonchakara* or a *Gamakara* is appointed to oversee the implementation and distribution of water.

### **Cultural unity through *talapariges***

The *talapariges* were of great religious significance for the community. Any occasion, whether it was a local festival or religious procession began with worship offered to the goddess Gangamma in the tank centre point. This was significant for it was not a massive *pushkarani*, a historic *kalyani* or even a small natural pond in the rocks. Mostly, square water pits, *talapariges* had stone slabs on three sides and were visible only from close quarters. Yet they held great significance for farmers, as drought patterns could be assessed based on the water levels in the *talaparige*. If

a *talaparige* dried up, it was a signal of difficult times for farmers, and for life of the community itself. A dry 'water eye' was an indication of the water scarcity that was likely to follow.

*Talapariges*, once a central part of the rural community have mostly fallen into disuse today. While some have dried up due to continuous drought and indifference, others have been encroached upon. One such example is a public *talaparige* near Koratagere town, which has now become part of a private property. Many such instances have virtually erased the tradition of the *talaparige*, thereby destroying entire chains of this unique system.

There is an urgent need to undertake a detailed study of the significance of *talapariges* and revive this beautiful art and science in nature.

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